



## Will Pearson

### Understanding the Millennial Influencers

It's clear that businesses and their leaders need to understand all they can about the Millennial generation – a group that is important to their future business success.

But what's also clear is that the characteristics and qualities of Millennials remain a mystery. In his presentation to World Innovation Forum delegates, Will Pearson, President and Co-founder of trivia magazine and website *mental\_floss*, provided some insight into this influential generation.

"It's not just knowing some things about Millennials, it's understanding what we then do with that knowledge," said Pearson.

Pearson said Millennials are an "incredibly resilient generation. They're actually one that has risen to the challenge of the current economic struggle in ways other generations haven't. They're adapting faster than any generation before them."

Pearson provided the following observations about the Millennial generation:

**They are on pace to become the most educated generation in American history.** Pearson said they are saving for their future, and doing so years before Generation Xers and Baby Boomers did. They are also goal setters.

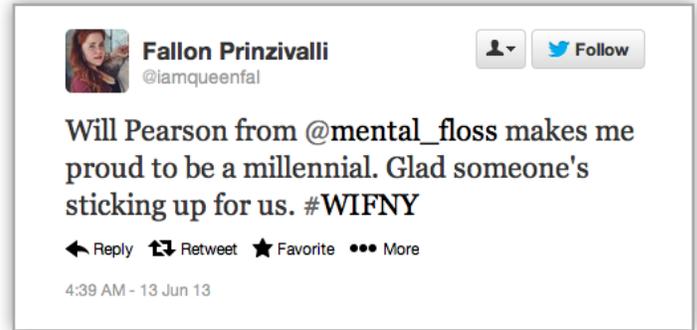
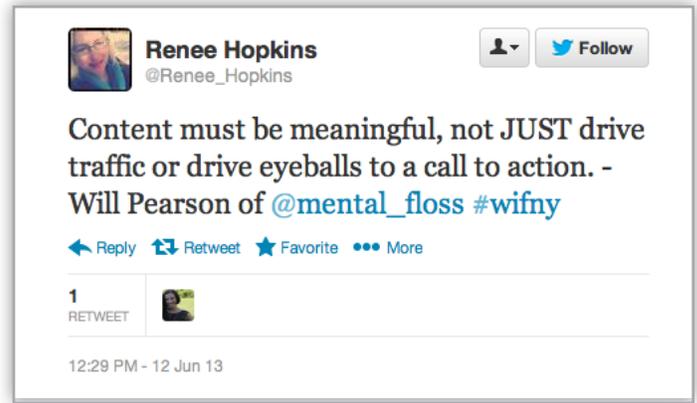
**They get along with their parents. They are not rebellious.** "Negative selling doesn't really work with this generation," said Pearson.



Millennials switch attention between devices up to 27 times an hour. "What it means is we have to be able to be available to them, and our content has to win in every conceivable medium in any window they give us," said Pearson.

Practically every waking minute is spent using a smartphone or device. This requires rethinking how and when content is delivered. To respond, *mental\_floss*





*floss* began to provide a “constant stream of information throughout the day and in different ways. We have to constantly come up with ideas that appeal to readers at just about any hour of the day.”

Millennials describe news as one-sided propaganda, repetitive and boring. They are a generation that is optimistic “and wants to solve problems and know new things, and we have to be there for them and help them do that.” Pearson noted the importance of finding ways to participate in the conversation about a major news event. “We still want to be able to share information about it,” he said. “We have to do so in a way that cuts through the clutter.”

They’ll get involved in a brand’s activities if it aligns with their interests and it gives them a sense of ownership. “Our readers are driving the content that goes onto the site,” said Pearson. “We have to give them that sense of ownership, and that’s why they come back – because they know we depend on them to actively participate.”

They’re not just more likely than other generations to share their opinions online, they’re also driving the conversation of all generations online. Pearson said *mental\_floss* strives to give readers the opportunity to drive that conversation.

Much more likely to engage with a brand through social media. “With each of the social media platforms, we look for the most interesting ways to engage that audience,” said Pearson. “When we do call on them to do certain things, we build that trust, and we’re ready to show up.” It’s more than driving traffic back to a site. It’s about making each experience meaningful so visitors will return to the site and remain loyal to that brand.

Social media helps define people. Pearson said it’s the same with knowledge. “We give people something to talk about, something that helps define them,” he explained.

They’re known for “renting, borrowing and streaming” their entertainment. But if they want something, they’ll find a way to pay for it. Pearson said this wasn’t about giving their magazine away. It was about charging a full price and establishing a value for the product. When Millennials put a value on something, they are willing to pay for it. ■